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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 000828

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, IO/PHO, AND AF/RSA

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN PEACEKEEPERS DEPART FOR CONGO

REF: (A) GUATEMALA 0392 (B) 04 GUATEMALA 3163 (NOTAL)

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Guatemalan military continue to expand their participation in peacekeeping operations, most recently with 105 Guatemalan peacekeepers joining the MONUC mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Guatemalan Defense Ministry has apparently won an interagency struggle over the destination of UN payments for peacekeeping, with the funds to go to the Defense Ministry rather than the general treasury. The GOG is moving ahead with plans to provide another 75 person contingent to MONUC with only details of Finance Ministry funding to be worked out. The Guatemalan military does not appear to be large enough to accommodate Guatemalan desires for increased peacekeeping participation. End Summary.

¶12. (U) The Defense Ministry's March 29 departure ceremony at the military side of La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City garnered widespread attendance and media attention. In addition to President Berger, Vice President Stein, Foreign Minister Briz, and Defense Minister General Aldana attended the one-hour ceremony, together with most of the senior Guatemalan military officers assigned to the capital. In a brief but laudatory speech, President Berger praised the military for its peacekeeping contributions, boasted of his administration's accomplishments in military downsizing and transformation, and attempted to reassure the emotional family members of the Guatemalan MONUC contingent. Following his speech, Berger and other senior officials greeted members of the 105 person contingent and mingled with family members, many of whom were crying or showing other signs of distress over the departure of their loved ones.

¶13. (SBU) The Guatemalan personnel will receive UN reimbursement on a sliding scale equal to that received by Guatemalan troops in Haiti. (In October, Guatemala deployed a company-size military police contingent to MINUSTAH.) Officers in Congo will receive 90 percent of the UN reimbursement, NCOs will get 60 percent, and soldiers will receive 50 percent. Although the exact details remain unclear, the Guatemalan Kaibil (Special Forces) soldiers in the contingent will apparently receive a slightly higher percentage than their non-Kaibil colleagues. The remainder of the UN funds will go to the Defense Ministry rather than the general treasury as was proposed by the Finance Ministry.

¶14. (SBU) During a Defense Ministry peacekeeping presentation at a March 15 GOG cabinet meeting, President Berger approved a Defense Ministry request to obtain GOG funding to equip a second 75 person Military Police contingent for MONUC. The Defense Ministry is now attempting to work out the funding details with the Finance Ministry. The Guatemalans are aiming for a June deployment date to the Congo but this may slip until July.

¶15. (SBU) Comment: The senior leadership of the Guatemalan military strongly supports participation in peacekeeping operations as a vehicle for enhancing the professionalization of the Guatemalan military (principally through exposure to other military forces and through experience gained in out-of-area joint operations). The Guatemalan Government -- especially the Foreign Ministry -- is equally enthusiastic in supporting efforts that it views as enhancing Guatemala's international reputation. Guatemala's commitment to international peacekeeping is a very positive development and one we should encourage politically and support logistically whenever possible.

¶16. (SBU) Comment continued: However, desires to expand Guatemala's participation will soon run into personnel constraints because of the military's 15,500 personnel strength ceiling. Guatemala's PKO commitments to date are at less than 300 personnel, but this number must be multiplied by a factor of three to account for troop rotations. In addition, Guatemala is providing specialized personnel (most notably military police) rather than infantry; the Guatemalan military force structure contains only a limited number of such personnel (e.g. less than 400 military police). To address a shortage of military police (who are also in high demand to provide support to Guatemala's National Civilian Police) by expanding the number of such personnel is not a

viable option as it would negatively impact the military's ability to implement its modernization program of operational platforms to replace the old territorial structure. For this reason, the Guatemalan military is exploring the idea of emulating other countries by not counting deployed peacekeepers against its personnel ceiling, an idea that would likely generate strong political opposition.

HAMILTON